

Focus on Whitefish

Study Sheds Light on Whitefish of the Kotzebue Sound Region of Alaska

Whitefish are an important subsistence resource in the Kotzebue Sound region, but researchers have given them little attention until recently. A new report, funded through the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program, collected local knowledge of the natural history and subsistence harvest and use of whitefish in the Kotzebue Sound region. Information gathered in this study can help further the understanding of whitefish in the region and help biologists make management decisions affecting these fish.

Over the course of the study, 57 individuals, mostly Inupiaq elders, were interviewed in Kobuk, Kotzebue, Noatak, Noorvik, Selawik, and Shun-

gnak. Interviews covered such topics as the Inupiaq taxonomy of whitefish, seasonal movements, spawning, abundance, and feeding habits of whitefish. Many interesting observations on whitefish natural history were recorded as a result of the interviews, for example, new information on the range of whitefish species and general locations of spawning areas were documented.

In addition to shedding light on biological questions regarding whitefish, this study documented subsistence practices and traditions related to these fish. Interviewers asked questions about traditional and contemporary fishing techniques, and the processing and use of whitefish.



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Humpback whitefish are harvested in greater numbers than other whitefish species in the Kotzebue Sound region.

Of particular interest is the whitefish fishery at Anigaaq near Kotzebue where ditches or trenches are used as harvest techniques. Those interviewed about the whitefish fishery in this area revealed previously undocumented details about the timing of the fishery, social rules and organization, construction of the ditches, and storage of the catch. ●



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A qargisaq, or ditch, is used as means of catching whitefish in Anigaaq. The method is unique to the coastal lagoons near Kotzebue. It is an effective method, but is being replaced by the use of gillnets

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